



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE PERSISTENCE OF SOCIAL GROUPS. II.*

IN many cases the structure of the group is from the beginning adjusted to such alternation between functions immediately discharged by the group and those that are performed by an organ. Thus in stock companies, the technical management of which is committed to directors, while the stockholders in general meeting may either remove the directors or prescribe conditions which the latter may be either indisposed or incompetent to adopt for themselves. Small associations which are accustomed either to manage their affairs through a president or a committee are usually so arranged that these organs either voluntarily or involuntarily surrender their powers so soon as they cease to be equal to the burden or the responsibility of their functions. Every revolution which deposes a political government from power and gives back legislation and administration to the immediate initiative of the elements belongs in this sociological form. It follows as a matter of course that not every group can adapt itself to such reversion of type. In very large groups, or in those that live under very complicated conditions, the assumption of administrative functions by the group directly is a simple impossibility. The structure of organs is not to be recalled, and their flexibility and vital interdependence with the elements can at most show themselves in the ability of the elements to change the *persons* who at a given moment compose the organ, and replace them with more suitable persons. Nevertheless it is continually happening, even in cases of rather high sociological development, that the group power flows back from the organs to its original source, though this may be but a process of transition to the formation of new organs. The Episcopal church in the United States was at the disadvantage of being without a bishop until the end of the last century, because the mother

* Translated by Albion W. Small.

church of England, which alone could consecrate a bishop, refused to do so for political reasons. In dire extremity and in danger of complete disruption the congregations resolved to help themselves. In the year 1784 they appointed delegations, laymen and clergymen, who assembled and constituted themselves the supreme unifying body and central organ of church government. A special historian of this epoch pictures it in these words: "Never had so strange a sight been seen before in Christendom as this necessity of various members knitting themselves together into one. In all other cases the unity of the common episcopate had held such limbs together; every member had visibly belonged to the community of which the present bishop was the head." The imminent coherence of the communicants, which up to that time had centered in the organ—the bishop—which at the same time had become a reality outside of this organ, now came into view in its original character. The power was restored to that immediate reciprocity of the elements which had projected it from itself.

This case is especially interesting because the function of holding the church members together was conferred on the bishop by consecration, that is, it came from a superior source, apparently independent of that function. Now, however, it is restored by a purely sociological process and in this process the source of its energy is unequivocally revealed. That the local churches had the sagacity, after so protracted and so efficient determination of their sociological powers to an organ, to supply the place of this again by the immediate exercise of those powers was a symptom of extraordinary health in their religious life. Very many communities of the most various sorts have failed because the relation between their elementary social powers and the organs which they had produced was not constructive enough to refer the functions necessary for social self-preservation back to the elementary powers, in case the organs differentiated for those functions disappeared or became inefficient.

The elaboration of differentiated organs is, so to speak, a sub-

stantial aid to social self-preservation. Thereby a new member grows upon the structure of society. We must treat quite apart from this the question how the impulse of self-preservation affects the life of the group in functional respects. The question whether this group life progresses in undifferentiated unity or with specialized organs is for this purpose secondary. The question is rather with reference to the general form or *tempo* in which the life processes of the group proceed. We meet here two chief possibilities. The group may be preserved, (1) by conserving with the utmost tenacity its firmness and rigidity of form, so that the group may meet approaching dangers with substantial resistance, and may preserve the relation of its elements through all change of external conditions; (2) by the highest possible variability of its form, so that adaptation of form may be quickly accomplished in response to change of external conditions, so that the form of the group may adjust itself to any demand of circumstances. This duality of possibilities obviously arises from a quite general demeanor of the group. Analogies may be found in every possible realm, even the physical. A body is protected against destruction from stress and shock either by rigidity and unyielding cohesion of its elements, so that the attacking force makes no impression; or by pliability and elasticity, by virtue of which it gives way before every onset, to be sure, but after each attack ceases it recovers its previous form. We have now to discuss these two ways of social preservation.

Persistence by means of the conservative policy seems to be the method indicated wherever the aggregate consists of very diverse elements with latent or potent antipathies, so that every attack, no matter of what sort, is dangerous, and even measures for maintenance and for positive usefulness must be avoided if they entail agitation. Accordingly a state that is very complex, and must perpetually balance a somewhat unstable equilibrium, as is the case with Austria, will, on the whole, be strongly conservative because any disturbance might produce an irreparable disarrangement of the equilibrium. This consequence attaches

itself in general to the form of heterogeneity of the component elements in a large group, unless this diversity leads to the harmonious interlacing of interests that comes from essential unity. The danger to the maintenance of the social *status quo* lies here in the fact that every disturbance must produce very different sorts of consequences in the different strata of the group, because they are the repositories of highly contrasted energies. The smaller the amount of essential compatibility between the elements of the group, the more probable is it that new agitations, new stimulations of consciousness, new occasions for resolves and for developments will force the contrasted elements still further apart. There are countless ways in which people may be estranged from each other, but often only a single way of approach. Consequently it makes no difference how useful the changes might be in themselves, their effects upon the elements will bring the entire heterogeneity of the latter to expression, and to heightened expression, just as the mere lengthening of divergent lines makes the divergence more evident.^{*} The avoidance of every innovation, of every departure from the previous way, a severe and rigid conservatism, is here indicated, therefore, in order to hold the group in its existing form.

But without a divergence of group elements to the extent of enmity, the same conservative character will be favorable to the maintenance of the group whenever the divergence, of whatever

^{*} It sometimes looks as though the very shocks of a foreign war serve to reconcile elements of the state that were drawing apart, to establish the equilibrium that was threatened, and so to preserve the forms of the state. This, however, is only an apparent exception which really proves the rule. War really appeals to those energies which are common to the discordant elements of the community. These are vital and fundamental in their nature. War brings them so forcibly into consciousness that its disturbances actually nullify the differences. Thus the condition which, so far as our present thought is concerned, makes war dangerous disappears in the presence of war. In case the attack is not sharp enough to overcome the enmities present in the group, war produces the above asserted effects. How often has war given the last blow to a state system suffering from internal disruption! How often political groups, torn by internal dissensions, have faced the alternative of war against others, which might either cause domestic quarrels to be forgotten, or might on the contrary aggravate them beyond reconciliation!

sort, is considerable. Where the social differences are very marked, and where they do not merge into each other through intermediate gradations, any sudden movement and disturbance of the structure of the whole must be much more dangerous than when many intermediate strata are present. This follows from the fact that evolution always affects at first a portion of the group exclusively or with especial energy. Accordingly, in the case last considered, the consequences or extension of the evolution will appear but gradually, while in the first case the movement will be much more violent and will take sudden hold of portions of the group that are most distant and most opposed. The intermediate classes act then as buffers. In the event of sudden developments, or unavoidable disturbance of the structure of the whole, they graduate, mollify, and distribute the shock.

It is most necessary to preserve at all hazards the social peace, stability, and conservative character of the group life in those instances in which the group structure is discontinuous and characterized by sharp internal differences. For that reason we notice, as a matter of fact, that in groups containing tremendous and irreconcilable class contrasts, peace and persistence of the forms of social life are more apt to prevail than in cases of approach and mediation and commingling between the extremes of the social scale. In the latter case preservation of the whole in the *status quo ante* is much more likely to be along with unstable conditions, sudden developments, and progressive tendencies.

This connection between stability of the social character and width of distances between social elements betrays itself in the opposite direction. In case the preservation of the group, by means of stability, is mechanically forced, abrupt social differences often take shape with that end in view. This appears in the development of peasant serfdom in Russia. In the Russian there has always been a strong nomadic impulse. The level character of the country tended to confirm this impulse. To insure regular cultivation of the soil it was consequently necessary to take from the peasant his liberty to come and go at will.

That took place under Feodor in 1593. When the peasant was once bound to the soil he gradually lost the elements of freedom that he had formerly possessed. The forced immobility of the peasant became here, as in all the rest of Europe, the leverage by which the landlord degraded him lower and lower. That at first merely provisional device at last turned the peasant into a mere chattel of the estate. Thus the impulse of self-preservation in the group produces, not alone in case of existing contrasts, a tendency to stability of life forms; but, in case this impulse directly calls these contrasts into existence, growing social differences attach themselves to the impulse, and thus afford evidence of the essential relationship here asserted.

A further instance in which the self-preservation of the group makes for all possible stability and rigidity of its forms is evident in the case of outlived structures which have no longer an inherent right of existence, and whose elements really belong in other relations and social formations. Starting with the end of the Middle Ages, for example, the German community-associations suffered reduction of their effectiveness and of their rights through the growth of centralized administrations. Instead of retaining the vital power of cohesion which they had possessed by virtue of the importance of their former social rôle, there remained to them only the mask and externalities of those former possessions. In this plight the final means of self-preservation was very rigid exclusiveness, an unqualified prevention of the entrance of new associates. Every quantitative extension of a group requires certain qualitative modifications and adaptations. An obsolete structure cannot go through these changes without collapse. The social form is in very close dependence upon the numerical definiteness of its elements. That structure of a society which is appropriate for a given number of members is no longer appropriate when a certain increase has occurred. The process of transformation into the new form demanded force, the assimilation and disposition of the new elements consume force. Structures which have lost their essential meaning have no strength left for this task. They

must rather use all the energy remaining to protect the still surviving form against internal and external dangers. That rigid exclusion of new associates, which later characterizes the out-lived *Zunft* organizations, signified immediately, therefore, that the group was confirming its stability by the exclusion which confined it to its once acquired members and their descendants. It signified still further, however, an avoidance of those reconstructions which are necessary with every quantitative extension of the group, modifications for which a structure that has outlasted its usefulness has no longer the requisite strength. The instinct of self-preservation will consequently lead such a group to measures of rigid conservatism. In general, structures that are unfit for competition will incline to these means, for in the degree in which their form is variable, in which it passes through different stages and accomplishes new adaptations, occasion is given to competitors for dangerous attacks. The most assailable stage for societies as for individuals is that between two periods of adjustment. Whoever is in motion cannot at every moment be so guarded on all sides as he may be who is in a position of stability and repose. A group which has a feeling of insecurity with reference to its competitors will on that account for the sake of its self-preservation avoid all variation, and will live in accordance with the principle *quieta non movere*.

This rigid self-limitation is especially to the purpose whenever competition is not yet present, but the aim is to prevent its appearance, because of conscious inability to cope with it. Rigorous measures of exclusion alone will in this case maintain the status, because if new relationships arise, if new points of connection with parties outside the group are offered, the group will be drawn into a wider sphere, in which it might encounter competition that could not be overcome. This sociological norm may be operative very widely in the following connection. An irredeemable paper currency has the peculiarity, in contrast with redeemable paper money, that it circulates only within the territory of the government that issues it, and cannot be exported. This is proclaimed as its greatest advantage. It

remains in the country. It is ready at hand for all enterprises. It does not take part in that equalization of precious metal with other states which immediately produces importation of foreign goods and the outflow of money, if there is a superfluity of money and consequent rise of prices. Consequently, if the circulating power of currency is limited to the country of issue, the circulating medium becomes an inner bond of unity for that country, and a means by which it maintains its social form, since it shuts the country off from the great competition of the world's markets. A country that is industrially strong and equal to any competitive enterprise would not need this means. It would rather be sure that it would increase the strength of its essential form in the variability of exchange, and in the developments of reciprocal dependence.

GEORG SIMMEL.

UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN.

(To be continued.)